



Korean American Families

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Seminar paper from the year 2001 in the subject American Studies - Culture and Applied Geography, grade: 1,3 (A), Humboldt-University of Berlin (Anglistics/American Studies), course: Asian American Literature: Foodways and Cultural Transformation(s), 9 entries in the bibliography, language: English, abstract: "Your life can be different, Young Ju. Study and be strong. In America, women have choices."¹

Korean people tend to define women as wives, mothers, caregivers, or just simply as girls, always with regard to their sexual behavior rather to their individuality as a person. For over five hundred years Confucianism has been the mainstream of Korean culture and tradition, setting the social role of Korean women. Koreans still strongly believe in Confucian values, behave, feel, and think in Confucian ways, despite the fact that Koreans, particularly Korean Americans and specifically Korean American women, have experienced new social realities and such social changes as modern socialization, westernisation, Christianization, industrialization, and immigration to the American socio-cultural setting.

The major premises for this paper are (1) a view on women in Korea and Confucian values in Korean society. (2) What happens when a traditional immigrant couple arrives in America and that a departure from traditional roles often results in domestic violence. (3) The role of Korean children in Korea and in America. These considerations build the theoretical background for (4) an examination of a Korean American novel of a family experiencing new social realities upon arriving in the United States.

The paper will show that the Confucian values are still dominating in Korean American families and that a departure of the traditional family setting is hard or impossible for single family members, especially for the men who see their patriarchal authority over their wife and children erode. The women begin to question the superior position of their husbands and children experience a time of confusion and frustration for their parents often disagree about new ways of raising them. This paper will also show that the problems and examples given in the novel *A Step from heaven* by An Na are typical for Korean American immigrants and that children are again the ones that suffer the most.

¹ Na, An: *A Step from heaven*. New York, 2000

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